

**William Short to Thomas Jefferson, October 9,
1823, from the Thomas Jefferson and William Short
Correspondence, Transcribed and Edited by Gerard W.
Gawalt, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress**

William Short to Thomas Jefferson

Philada. Oct. 9. 1823.

Dear Sir

Your kind favor of the 8th ulto. was waiting for me here, & I recieved & read it with those feelings which I always experience in what comes from You. I am under real obligation for the manner in which you have allowed me to substitute the next summer for this fall. For independently of the full sufficiency I have had of locomotion for the present, another obstacle would have presented itself to my traveling at present off of the pavement of the City; the universal spread of disease throughout this whole country & more especially in those regions hitherto the most remarkable for their healthiness. Although I have not heard that this unprecedented & inexplicable state of things has reached Monticello or its neighborhood, yet it is known, & published in all the papers, that it occupies whole districts through which it would have been necessary to pass. The whole neighborhood of Philadelphia including the heights of Germantown & the mountainous region beyond it, has as regularly established a Country fever as the Rice swamps of Carolina. At the same time those who remain on the pavement of the City & do not risk themselves even in the suburbs, enjoy uncommon degree of exemption from disease. Should this malæria gain the like next year, as it seems to be making a regular progress here similar to that observed of late years at Rome, I really see nothing to be done but to fly by sea from this deadly foe. It has already entered the outskirts of the City. We hope that frost will check it

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for the present, but as everything in this new disorder seems to be au rebours it is possible the frost may now act as a conductor instead of a destroyer.

If you know my real disposition & present habits of life, you would not

suppose that my “flitting & gay assemblage” at the New York watering places, could be as agreeable to me as the “plain & sober family & neighborly society” I should find with you. Yours have had their customary effect on my taste & disposition & have now arrived to consider perfect repose as the summum bonum of life, & to appreciate the dolce far niente of the Italians.

What you say of the progress of the University gives me the greatest pleasure. Every thing combines to make me take a sincere & heartfelt satisfaction in the prospect of that institution. Its being devoted to the cultivation & improvement of the human mind would suffice of itself-but its being located in my native state, to which I am proud to belong & a district to which I have ever remained partial from early association, add to it also. I cannot help fearing for it, the growing influence of the Presbyterian principles in the Legislature. That sect, which I consider as Protestant Jansenists, will vigorously oppose it I apprehend on every ground & to that end will avail themselves of the popular objection to the importation of the Professors from abroad-an evil if it be one, for which I see no remedy. I had in store for you here a Professor of Mathematics. He may be considered as unique in this country, or at least by the side of Bowditch. But when I counted on him he was poor, I have no doubt would have accepted the offer most willingly. I doubt it much now, as he is well placed in a life insurance office, where he is indispensable to them, & where they would probably make his place still more agreeable & profitable rather than lose him.

I have nothing to apprehend any where from the “wrangling about the next President”-I am too little acquainted with the several candidates to feel any of that highly excited interest,

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which arise from attainment to persons rather than principles-My first wish is that he who shall be chosen

may be so indisputable chosen, that contending parties can by no possibly hang a doubt on the choice. It has always appeared to me that this is the fragile part of our constitution, & past experience even has not given me any assurance. What has taken place has been merely, as it strikes me, in the way of the Abbe Gubanes "rafle de six" The rafle here has come as yet only three times, & he allowed four times before his friend Dederot was to lose patience. Should our rafle continue I shall like the Abbe, believe that Providence has interfered in the business.

I admit only of one newspaper into my room. I found when I had several that they took up too much of the morning or the avant diner the only time that I now devote to serious occupation or study. But I see the Richmond Enquirer whenever I wish it, at the Athenæum, an institution of which I am one of the founders, where I pass a part of almost every evening. There are so many papers there, & there is so much in the Enquirer, that I by no means see the whole of each number, but I have always found it among the most ably edited of our papers.

You gratify me beyond expression, in what you say of the "only blot." I formerly, before my first return to America, had indulged myself in several theories & in very sanguine hopes on this subject, some of which I think I must have communicated to you at the time. I remember that among other things I had left by my will a certain amount of the 3 prct stock of which the income was to be forever applied to the purchase & liberation of females of that caste. I hoped others would follow this example & by a calculation somewhat in the way of the Jesuit Pere Patau, I found the whole race would be free in a few generations. I did not then foresee the greatest of all the difficulties-what was to be the consequence after they had been thus liberated. I must own that since my return & residence in America I have considered all such efforts as mere visions. An inseperable difficulty must ever be found in this, that every reform must

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depend precisely on those whose prejudices & whose interests are the most opposed to, & would be the most likely to take the alarm at any squinting towards a reform. Until I shall see the Members of the Holy Alliance awaking out of their present dreams & reforming their own abuses of themselves, I own I shall hardly expect to see our Legislators acting in that way. Indeed if I were called upon to say what ought to be done, I own also I should be obliged to confess my ignorance. To think of a total reform & a general emancipation I should consider the worst species of madness. Short of that however I think much might be done without danger, towards raising this caste in the scale of being & in diminishing their sufferings. Such for instance as assimilating their condition to the Serfs of Europe. I reflected a great deal on this matter when formerly in Europe, but my observation here has convinced me that nothing of this kind will be ever attempted. I have never spoken of it to any of my Southern friends, merely as an academical question, without percieiving that it was impossible to induce them to give it one moment's serious & calm reflexion. "Les magens d'executor" might & probably would present many difficulties which do not now present themselves to me; yet I see no other road so likely to lead to any desirable result, & none which I should so much wish to see attempted.

I wish I could by any means know your sentiments on this mode, but knowing how many friends & correspondents you have to attend to, it would be unreasonable in me to ask you to write to me on it. I cannot however terminate this long letter without adding how much gratification I derive from your letters & above all when they tell me that you are well. This is a pleasure I never fail to share with your friends here, & this I hope will induce you to give it to me as often as you can do it without too much effort & inconvenience to yourself. For after all, it is your ease, your convenience, your health, & your happiness which ever form the first wish & desire of dear sir, your faithful friend & servant.WShort

RC (Jefferson Papers, DLC)